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THE NORTHERN INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

BY JUDGE TIMOTHY E. HOWARD,
President of the Society.

HISTORICALLY speaking, St. Joseph county is the oldest in the State. The soil of our county was the first to receive the imprint of the white man's foot. It is reasonably certain that Marquette passed up the Kankakee, across the portage and down the St. Joseph, in May, 1675; and it is not at all a matter of doubt that a little over four years later, in December, 1679, LaSalle, with eight canoes and about thirty white men, and led by an Indian guide, came up the St. Joseph from Lake Michigan, passing through the city of South Bend, as well as that of Mishawaka, and going as far up the river as the present town of Osceola.

These dates of May, 1675, and December, 1679, carry our local history further back than that of any other county of the State of Indiana. But the route taken by Marquette and LaSalle, that is, by way of the St. Joseph and the Kankakee, including also the five-mile portage connecting the two rivers, had been for ages before the white man's coming the highway of travel and commerce from the lakes to the gulf. Lake Superior copper has been traced from old Mound Builders' mines in upper Michigan to the tombs of Peru, in South America, and it was by this ancient highway through St. Joseph county that this commerce was carried on.

By our own portage, connecting the St. Joseph and the Kankakee, came the Mound Builder, the Indian and the Frenchman, years on years, and even ages on ages, before the English language was heard about the great "south bend" of the St. Joseph river.

With this fine past before their eyes, it is not to be wondered at that those who made up the intelligent community formed from the enterprising pioneers first attracted to the rich lands of these valleys should at a very early date have had their attention directed to a study of the peoples that had gone before them.

Historical remains were in evidence on all sides. Geologically, also, the locality was most interesting—none more so in all the great northwest.

Accordingly, as early as 1867, if not earlier, steps were taken in the city of South Bend for the formation of a historical society for the study of the early history of this county and its vicinity. It is well to call to mind the names of the eminent citizens who took part in the organization of this early historical society. On October 26, 1867, the first meeting took place and the following were in attendance: Horatio Chapin, Woolman J. Holloway, George F. Layton, Thomas S. Stanfield, Lathrop M. Taylor, Phillip B. Boone, Charles Morgan, John Brownfield, Louis Humphreys, Almond Bugbee, Joseph G. Bartlett, William L. Barrett, John T. Lindsey, John Reynolds, Mark Whinery, Elisha Egbert, Charles M. Tutt, Benjamin Wall, Ethan S. Reynolds, Jacob Hardman, Benjamin F. Price, Jacob N. Massey, Ricketson Burroughs, Elliott Tutt, Matthias Stover, John A. Henricks, Daniel Greene, Daniel Dayton, Daniel A. Veasey, Charles W. Martin, Schuyler Colfax, Francis R. Tutt and William Miller.

We may confidently venture the statement that no county in the State, at that date or at the present, could show a list of names representing a higher type of citizenship than that represented by those organizers of our first historical society. The organization was completed on November 2, 1867, and many interesting meetings followed. Among the most valued papers then produced were those of Judge Stanfield and Dr. Humphreys. But one member of the noble company still survives, Daniel Greene, now past his ninetieth year, but still in good physical health and in the full enjoyment of his faculties. He is a fine representative of the superior men and women who laid the foundations of our county's history.

The society organized in 1867 continued to flourish until after many of the guiding spirits had passed away. There was then for a time a lull in the study of our local history. The pioneers had departed, one by one, and their sons and daughters did not immediately take up the work. But the longing for the old is like the longing for the wild; it finally takes irresistible possession of the soul. The rocks, the streams, the forests are again studied.

Relics are again sought for. Old books, manuscripts, tools and remains of former days become precious once more. Again collections are made, and papers portraying the past again become fascinating.

It is not, therefore, surprising that on August 7, 1894, a party was made up to visit the site of old Fort St. Joseph's, a little below South Bend, and once the seat of government for all the northwestern wilderness. These were reverent pilgrims who on that day went forth to look with awe upon the ground which for a century had been the seat of empire for all the region to the west and the north. There was no Chicago in those days, but the capital of the wilderness, the seat of civil and military power, the place of merchandise and the headquarters of the Christian missions, was this old Fort St. Joseph's.

To the old fort, therefore, went our historical pilgrims on that August day in 1894; and there it was that they resolved to form a Northern Indiana and Southern Michigan Historical Society—at least a society which should be broad enough in purpose to study out and preserve the history of “the St. Joseph country.”

On January 22, 1895, formal steps were taken to complete the organization, and a committee was appointed to draw up a constitution, rules and by-laws, which were adopted February 5, 1895. The name finally chosen was that by which the association has since been known, the Northern Indiana Historical Society; but the scope of investigation was to extend to the St. Joseph valley in general, whether in Indiana or Michigan, as well as to the county of St. Joseph and vicinity in particular, and also to the mysterious region of the Kankakee. Soon after its organization the society deemed it well to secure a charter under the State law. On February 4, 1896, articles of incorporation were drawn up, and on February 29, 1896, the charter was issued.

The articles of incorporation provided, among other things, that the objects of the organization should be:

“To institute and encourage historical inquiry, to collect and preserve the materials of history, and to spread historical information, especially concerning the Saint Joseph valley in northern Indiana and Southern Michigan; also for the study of all branches of general, modern and ancient history.

"The collection and formation of a museum of historical articles.

"The collection and preservation of a library of books and documents.

"The general discussion of historical and literary subjects, and the intellectual and social improvement of the society."

The charter members of the society were:

Lucius Hubbard, Martha O. Hubbard, George A. Baker, Bessie A. Baker, Howard S. Stanfield, Flora L. Stanfield, Otto M. Knoblock, Margaret S. Knoblock, Richard H. Lyon, Frances A. Lyon, Charles H. Bartlett, Anna Bartlett, Chauncey N. Fassett, Ann Thrush Fassett, Corwin B. Van Pelt, Marion B. Van Pelt, Thaddeus S. Taylor, Sarah Chestnutwood Taylor, George Ford, Josephine Oliver Ford, George B. Beitner, Flora L. Beitner, William B. Starr, Charles Albert McDonald, Fannie E. McDonald, Edwin Nicar, Cora B. Nicar, Willis A. Bugbee, William B. Stover, David R. Leeper, Stuart MacKibbin, Peter E. Studebaker, Mary L. Studebaker, John M. Studebaker, Mary Stull Studebaker and James DuShane.

Many others have since become members of the society. The number of the directors was to be four, to be elected annually, and these were also to constitute an executive committee who should be the active managers of the society. The first directors were Lucius Hubbard, president; Richard H. Lyon, vice-president; George A. Baker, secretary, and Otto M. Knoblock, treasurer. For several years Charles H. Bartlett was director and president and Flora L. Stanfield also director and vice-president. The directors succeeding those named, and now serving, are: Timothy E. Howard, president; Mary Stull Studebaker, vice-president; George A. Baker, secretary; Otto M. Knoblock, treasurer.

The society began at once the collection of material and the discussion of historical topics, and this work has been actively continued, chiefly through the untiring efforts of the secretary, Mr. George A. Baker, aided by Mr. Knoblock, Mr. Beitner, Mr. Lyon, Mr. Bartlett and others. The collection of relics, mementos, historical books, documents, pictures, etc., has long been pronounced the finest in the State and is priceless in value.

The papers read during the first year were as follows: Life of Alexis Coquillard, founder of the city and the county, by George Ford; The Carey Mission, by Margaret S. Knoblock; Early River Transportation, by Otto M. Knoblock; Fort St. Joseph's, by George A. Baker; Life of Lathrop M. Taylor, by his son, Thaddeus S. Taylor; Notable Visitors to South Bend, by Flora L. Stanfield; Early Schools of South Bend, by Flora L. Beitner; Kickapoo Bible and Alphabet, by Charles H. Bartlett; First Boot Factory in South Bend, by Chauncey N. Fassett; Chief Topinabee and the Treaty of 1828, by George A. Baker; Marriage Customs of the Pottawatomies, by Lucius Hubbard; From the Ranks to the Staff, by Edwin Nicar.

The program for the second year provided these papers: First Surveys of Northern Indiana, first section, by Willis A. Bugbee; Crimes and Casualties of St. Joseph County, by George B. Beitner; LaSalle, by Richard H. Lyon; The Kankakee Portage, by Charles H. Bartlett; Pierre Navarre, by Chauncey N. Fassett; Early Manufacturing Interests, by William B. Stover; Early Explorers of This Region, by Edwin C. Mason, honorary member of the society and president of the Chicago Historical Society; The Volunteer Fire Department of South Bend, by Edwin Nicar; The Hydraulic Power of St. Joseph County, by David R. Leeper; The Old Town of Bertrand, Michigan, by Flora L. Stanfield; Historical Address, by Lucius Hubbard; The Press of St. Joseph County, by Charles Albert McDonald; The Town of Mishawaka, by Marion B. Van Pelt; First Surveys of Northern Indiana, second section, by Willis A. Bugbee; The Underground Railroad, by Stuart MacKibbin; Lantern Exhibition of Local Scenery, by Lucius Hubbard and William B. Stover; The Michigan Road, by George Ford; Early Documentary History, from Paris and Ottawa Archives, by George A. Baker.

Some papers since read before the society are: The Glacial Phenomenon as Exhibited in Northern Indiana and Southern Michigan, by Dr. Hugh T. Montgomery; The Michigan Road, by Miss Ethel L. Montgomery; A Sketch of the Supreme Court of Indiana, and The Story of a Park (the first of the South Bend city parks), by Timothy E. Howard. Over sixty such original papers have been read and placed in the archives of the society.

The society's library is a most valuable one, consisting of from seven thousand to eight thousand volumes and documents. It received exchanges from over one hundred sister societies in this and foreign countries. This library is also a depository for the national and State publications, the latter believed to be one of the most complete in the State.

"It is doubtful," said the industrious secretary, Mr. George A. Baker, in an article in *The Indianian* for November, 1899, "if any other society in the country possesses such a unique collection of early French and English relics, consisting as it does of seals, coins, medals, crucifixes, crosses, brooches, finger- and earrings, beads, and almost every conceivable thing used in the early days. More than two thousand specimens found on the site of Fort St. Joseph's alone have been presented to the society." Indeed, it has become a matter of common occurrence for persons having valuable historical relics to present them to the Northern Indiana Historical Society, in order that they may be kept in a place of security, where they may be viewed and studied by those interested in the early history of this region.

The meetings are held regularly on the first Tuesday evening of each month, except during the summer. These meetings were for a long time held in the upper story of the City Library building, the society occupying the whole floor with its books, documents, portraits and cases of specimens and historical relics.

When the increasing needs of the City Library made it necessary that the Historical Society should seek other quarters, the county council and board of county commissioners, under statutory authority, and perceiving the priceless value of the work already done, voluntarily offered to provide a permanent home for the organization and its precious property. In this critical period of the life of the society, the active assistance of Commissioner Barney C. Smith entitles him to the particular remembrance of every friend of the organization. His proposition was that the first floor of the old court-house, a building which is itself a relic of great historical interest, should be fitted up and devoted to the uses of the society. The upper story of the old court-house had already been donated by the county to the occupancy of the Grand Army of the Republic; and in it Auten Post

had long been in the enjoyment of one of the finest Grand Army homes in the country.

By an act approved March 11, 1901, it was provided that where any historical society "shall have maintained its organization and have been actively engaged in the collection of data and material for, and in the preservation of county and State history and biography, for the period of not less than five consecutive years," the county might appropriate a sum not to exceed \$5,000 "for the construction and furnishings of rooms and fire-proof vaults for the meetings of such historical society and for the preservation of the records of such society and historical papers, documents and natural history collections."

Under provisions of this act and on proper petition, the county authorities in 1906 transformed the first floor of the old courthouse into what is one of the finest of historical rooms. The building, a substantial stone structure erected in 1860, may now be said to be wholly devoted to historical uses; for the Grand Army which occupies the upper story is itself historical, and in the nature of things will soon be historic, and this fine old stone edifice, which sheltered the war meetings of the county in the sixties, as it does the veterans of to-day, and where the business of the courts and offices of the county was conducted for nearly half a century, will for ages, undoubtedly, be the permanent home of the historical treasures of northern Indiana.

At stated times the rooms of the Historical Society are open to the inspection of the public and to the study of scholars; and the people, by their constant attendance on these occasions, have shown their appreciation of the treasures safely housed in the fine old structure, with its pillared portico and its simple Greek outlines, reminding us of the days when the world was young. Altogether, the Northern Indiana Historical Society is one of the most interesting and valuable of the literary organizations of the city of South Bend; and, permanently and safely located as it now is, it is certain to become of greater interest and value as time goes on and its treasures continue to accumulate, and to receive the attention of the students of our history.